

Policy on the integration of immigrants

The cornerstone of Iceland as a judicial state is democracy, human rights, social responsibility and individual freedom. This has been the government's guiding light when setting up the first policy on the integration of immigrants into Icelandic society, which the Immigration Council has worked on.

The government's goals with this policy are to secure to the most that all inhabitants of Iceland enjoy equal opportunities and take an active part in society and in most areas of human life. To my mind, it is necessary, especially in times of ever growing globalization, to take special care to ensure that human rights enjoy overall respect and that we in no way ease the demands that Icelanders make on themselves. As the Icelandic Constitution states, everyone shall be equal before the law and enjoy human rights regardless of their gender, religion, opinions, national origin, race, colour, financial status, descent and status. Men and women shall enjoy equal rights in all respects.

Both the goals put forward in this policy as well as the means to implement these goals include adult Icelandic studies, the communication and procurement of information, labour issues and labour market participation, education, health services and the role of municipalities in the integration of immigrants.

Society must be capable of reacting to new and altered conditions on the labour market, in the educational system, the health care services and other welfare services rendered by the state and municipalities.

Special emphasis is put on the preservation of the Icelandic language. It is important to make this clear. The Icelandic language is shared by the whole nation and preserves its history, culture and sense of self. It is also an instrument for social communication. Knowledge of Icelandic is the key to Icelandic society and can be the decisive factor regarding immigrants' integration into society.

It is in the interest of Icelandic society to give those who immigrate into the country the opportunity to find a venue for their proficiency, resourcefulness, and abilities.

The policy is available in Icelandic on the homepage of the Ministry for Social Affairs, www.felagsmalaraduneyti.is and we plan to translate it into more languages.

I wish you all the best and a really successful integration into Icelandic society.

Magnús Stefánsson Minister for Social Affairs